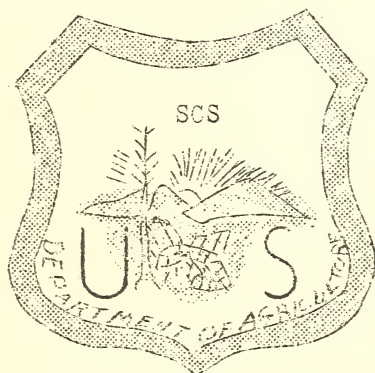


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THE TAR HEEL WASH OFF

JUNE - 1937



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

DEEP RIVER AREA

HIGH POINT, NORTH CAROLINA



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THE WASHOFF - DISCONTINUED

With this issue, the publication of the Tar Heel Washoff is being discontinued. For more than two and a half years this farm pamphlet has been going out each month to Soil Conservation Service cooperating farmers, to Agricultural Colleges, State Extension Service, County Agents, and to farm and civic organizations throughout the state. A few months ago it became necessary to limit our mailing list to cooperating farmers in the Deep River area.

Now that the work in the area is well under way, and due to a curtailment in the personnel of the Service, it has become necessary to discontinue the publication altogether, in its present form. It will be replaced, however, with a mimeographed news letter, issued quarterly, covering the most important phases of the work.

During the life of the Washoff, staff members and others of the Service, have faithfully cooperated in an attempt to compile and publish timely tips and helpful news items calculated to aid the farmer in the improvement of his farming practices and the conservation of his soils. We have enjoyed the work, and if we have succeeded in helping in the conservation of a single acre of soil, or the improvement of a single farming practice, then we feel amply repaid for the time and effort expended in getting out this publication.

In the discontinuance of the Washoff, however, there is no intention of severing the personal touch with the farmers in the area, and field men will continue to call as often as possible. We feel certain that every cooperating farmer will continue to carry on the good work of keeping the soil at home, which means so much, not only to him and the community at large at the present time, but to all posterity.

COST OF CONSERVATION

There have been many conflicting reports about how much it costs to control erosion. There have been an equal number of conflicting reports about how conservation practices affect the farm income. From the standpoint of dollars and cents, a number of conditions, such as the degree of erosion, type of soil, etc., must be taken into consideration. Some farmers in the Deep River area -- in cooperation with the Soil Conservation Service -- have been able to check erosion and at the same time increase their crop yields with but very little cash outlay, by merely making a few changes in their farming methods. On the other hand, there have been numerous cases where it was necessary to immediately control erosion at a relatively heavy cash cost. Such exceptions, however, were necessary because of some critical condition, such as the imperative need of immediate improvement, or of the protection of valuable lands. But it has been found that these expenditures are small when distributed over a period of years.

In any event, however, Deep River farmers are going ahead with their erosion control programs, because they realize that it is the common sense thing to do. They know from experience that gullies cannot be farmed and that crops will not grow on barren fields. They have come to a realization of the fact that a farm is practically worthless when the thin layer of topsoil is gone. Therefore, the tide of erosion must be stemmed, and the remaining soil conserved at all costs. Upon the successful accomplishment of this work, depends the future welfare of the community.

STRIP CROPPING

In driving along the highways in the Deep River area this spring numerous changes in the appearance of a large number of farms can be noticed. Many fields are seen with strips of light green that alternate with strips of a darker color. That is contour strip cropping. Bands of clean-tilled crops are alternated with bands of close-growing legumes or other soil-binding crops, following the contour of the field instead of running straight up and down the hill. It is an innovation in American Agriculture, and one part of the campaign that has been launched against soil erosion by the Soil Conservation Service.

In actual practice, the effects of strip cropping are like this: When a rain falls on a sloping field, it gathers force as it rushes down the hill. As the surface water increases in volume and intensity, it washes away particles of soil and carries them in suspension. When the muddy water reaches a strip of close-growing vegetation, soil particles are filtered out, the water is slowed down, and a large part of the water is absorbed by the soil. Instead of having one long slope planted to corn, tobacco or other clean-tilled crops that offer no resistance to escaping surface water, fields are broken up into sections, each with a short interval of slope.

Strip cropping is not a cure-all for erosion, but it is a mighty simple and effective remedy on many farms. It may be used with terraces, or in rotation, so that each strip has a different crop year after year. Or, feed crops can be grown in conjunction with other crops to eliminate point rows. Strip cropping is rapidly being recognized as one of the best farming practices for the control of erosion.

CONTOUR FARMING

A PROFITABLE FARMING PRACTICE

Contour farming has undoubtedly proved its worth in the Deep River area, and farmers cooperating with the Soil Conservation Service have found that this type of farming practice not only aids materially in the control of erosion, but that the moisture conserved leads to greater crop yields.

In this new method of farming, however, the farmers are experiencing some inconvenience in the elimination of point rows, because on fields of uneven slopes, areas are bound to occur where contour crop rows do not always parallel each other. To fill these places, it is necessary to plow short, or point rows. These short point rows also occur along fence lines, in natural draws, near knolls, or other places where the slope is varied and irregular. As a means of solving this problem, the Soil Conservation Service recommends that these areas be seeded to small grain or hay crops. Of course, the cultivated area is reduced slightly, but the added protection from erosion and the extra supply of feed, more than makes up for the reduction.

Another good practice is to re-locate fence lines, placing the fences on the exact contour. This will solve the point row problem on many farms, and at the same time leave a permanent guide for contour operations.

Strip cropping is another double-duty farm practice which can be used to eliminate point rows, and at the same time protect the soil against erosion. By planting cultivated crops in even-width strips, uneven strips can be left in close-growing crops, that do not have to be cultivated, thus automatically eliminating the objectionable point rows.

MOW WEEDS IN LESPEDEZA FIELDS

Vigorous growths of weeds in lespedeza fields should be mowed in order to conserve moisture and plant food which will be consumed by the weeds if they are allowed to grow. When rains come, the weeds grow much faster than the lespedeza, and not only absorb the moisture and plant food required by the lespedeza, but retard its development by shading.

If the weeds are not mowed now, both quality and quantity of lespedeza hay will be seriously decreased, as weeds are coarse and have little food value. On the other hand, if they are mowed in the immature stage, the weeds will settle and decay to form mulching material that will conserve moisture for a better hay production. In mowing, the cutter bar of the machine should be raised sufficiently to cut the weeds above the tops of the lespedeza. Also, the cutting of weeds on the field to be harvested for seed, will greatly improve the quality of the seed, and purity is one of the basic factors in determining price.

Lespedeza has proved itself extremely effective in checking erosion and highly efficient as a soil builder. Where lespedeza is grown in rotation, it is a good practice to harvest it the first season for hay, being careful not to cut it too closely in order to leave plenty for reseeding. The second year crop can be harvested for seed. Most of the plant can be left on the land if the seed is harvested with a pan attachment on the mower. By leaving most of the plant on the field, this growth of vegetable matter can be turned into the soil to improve fertility, increase the water holding capacity of the soil, and check and prevent further erosion.

LEGUMES AND SMALL GRAIN CROPS GROWING IN POPULARITY

The control of erosion is bringing about a new standard of values for farm crops in the Deep River area. The old system of farming which put the production of clean-tilled crops ahead of everything else, left only a small proportion of farm acreage for small grain, hay crops and pasture, thus further increasing the amount of land needed for clean-tilled crops to furnish the feed supply.

The small grains, legumes and other close-growing crops, which were given little consideration, are now being grown much more extensively, since their value for feed and for erosion control, has been fully recognized. By providing additional feed, they have reduced the acreage required for row crops. The growing of legumes, which increases the fertility of the soil as well as aids in erosion control, has made it possible to further reduce the acreage devoted to clean-tilled crops, by increasing the yields of these crops grown in rotation with legumes.

The steeper slopes can thus be devoted to pasture, hay crops and trees, which control erosion, and the more level areas, where erosion is less severe, can be devoted to the production of clean-tilled crops in rotation.

Conservation farming, thus does not mean that yields of cash crops be reduced, but rather, that erosion-resisting crops be given an opportunity to provide a well rounded farm program.

MULCHING

Mulching is one of the oldest, cheapest, and easiest farm practices known, for the control of erosion. More than a century and a half ago, George Washington used mulch -- he called it rubbish -- to prevent soil washing on his Mount Vernon lands.

Some of the best materials for mulching are manure, fallen leaves, brush, pine needles, small grain and lespedeza straw, and hay mow litter. If a gully or galled spot is well covered with a litter of straw, leaves or other material, the mulch will prevent the seed from being washed away, hold moisture for germination and vegetable growth, protect the ground from extreme temperatures of heat and cold, and will protect the new plantings from wind and water until they get a start.

By the liberal use of mulch, the farmer is duplicating, as nearly as possible, nature's own method of protecting young vegetation. Mulch is unusually valuable in the protection of young tree seedlings. It also aids grasses and legumes in getting a start on galled or badly eroded areas. Moreover, mulch eventually rots and becomes a part of the soil, thereby adding valuable plant food and humus, which increases the water-holding capacity of the soil. By the addition of a reasonably heavy application of manure or commercial fertilizer, a good start is made toward restoring fertility to badly eroded areas.

TREES ARE SOIL SAVERS

Trees are recognized as one of the best protections against soil erosion and one of the most effective agencies for the conservation of water; and properly managed woodlands will yield a good cash income like any other farm crop.

Every farm should have sufficient woodland to meet its needs, and excess production will always find a market demand.

Trees planted on steep slopes that are unfit for cultivation, on badly eroded fields with low fertility, on galled areas or large gullies, will control erosion, and in time, restore most of the fertility to the soil, and increase the value of the farm.

Under specified conditions, farmers who take part in a tree planting program this year, will become eligible for payments under the Soil Conservation program. These payments cover a part of the cost of planting the trees. Farmers can also earn payments for improving existing woodlands.

The County Agent or a member of the County Agricultural Conservation Committee can give the details of just what practices will entitle the land owner to payments and can advise which of these are best suited to a particular farm. But regardless of any cash compensation from the Federal Government, adequate woodlands should be established and maintained on every farm to insure the control of erosion.

CARE OF WILDLIFE IMPORTANT

Now that farmers in the Deep River area are beginning to harvest small grain and hay, they should use precaution to avoid the destruction of the nests of ground nesting birds, especially the quail. In harvesting small grain and mowing hay, nests are frequently destroyed and young birds killed. This condition can be remedied by the use of a very simple device known as a "flushing bar."

The flushing bar may be simply a long bamboo pole extending out several feet in front of the cutting blade and supporting a burlap sack weighted with old chains. This device flushes the covey ahead of the cutting blade and enables the farmer to locate the nests. Then the operator can lift his sickle to leave an undisturbed spot of cover around the nest. If this is done, it is highly probable that the nest will be revisited.

On farms where straw is not considered very valuable, setting the binder to cut higher than usual, leaves the nest undisturbed, and the incubating bird may then return. It is desirable to leave until last those parts of the field that are close to permanent cover and apt to be inhabited by birds. It is often difficult to get machinery into corners and odd spots of fields. If these places are left, they will furnish good food and cover. Occasionally a thicket will be found near the edge or in the middle of a field. These are good places to leave some standing grain.

Erosion control measures as applied in the Deep River area, are planned to stimulate the natural increases of desirable forms of wildlife.

AGREEMENT WRITING RESUMED

It may be of interest to many farmers in the Deep River area to know that the Washington Office has deemed it justifiable that we resume the signing up of cooperative agreements within the High Point project area.

We would appreciate it, therefore, if all farmers now cooperating with the Soil Conservation Service would notify their neighbors of the fact, that even at this late date, they may cooperate with the Government, in putting into effect on their farms a complete soil and water conservation program. Because of our limited staff of field workers, however, it will not be possible to reach every farmer within the watershed. Those making first application, will receive first consideration.



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